

September
2003



State Senator Liz Brater

The Lansing Report



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minute to e-mail me your e-mail
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receive updates by mail. Thank you!

Dear Friends,

Greetings from Lansing! It has been a busy year so far, addressing environmental, education, health care, and other important state issues.

Our biggest challenge has been addressing the \$1.7 billion budget deficit for fiscal year 2004. The budget process was difficult. In order to balance the budget, tough choices needed to be made about which departments or services would have to be cut in order to eliminate the deficit. It is never easy to make these kinds of decisions. However, after numerous discussions and debates, consensus was reached and a final budget was passed that reflects our state's commitment to education, children, health care, and our most vulnerable residents. You'll find more detailed information about the final budget later in this newsletter.

I am looking forward to meeting with district residents during a number of community Office Hours we have scheduled for this fall. See page two of the newsletter for dates, times, and locations and please plan to stop by and share your thoughts and ideas.

Liz Brater
State Senator • 18th District

2004 Budget Eliminates \$1.7 Billion Deficit

Just a few short weeks ago, we completed the budget for fiscal year 2004. The weeks of debate and discussion leading up to the final budget agreement were challenging as our state faced a \$1.7 billion deficit. Declining tax revenues, overly optimistic revenue projections, and an excessive use of one-time revenues, in addition to a sagging national economy, left us with a dreary picture for 2004.

The final budget agreement, worked out by the Governor and legislative leadership, and passed

by the House and Senate, balanced the budget but at the expense of severe budget cuts. In this difficult year, the Governor named as priorities protecting our children and our most vulnerable citizens. State spending was reduced by approximately \$1 billion. Following are highlights of the final fiscal 2004 budget:

- Per-pupil funding will be maintained at \$6,700, preserving critical funding for schools across the state.

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Legislative Update

Protecting Our Children's Privacy

I recently introduced legislation that will amend the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to exempt public school information or records that would identify a student from the Act's public disclosure requirements.

FOIA currently does not protect the information in our children's public school records or directories. School directories often include home addresses, phone numbers, and other

identifying information about students that should not be available to marketing agencies and others who would like information about our children.

Currently under FOIA, unless a particular area is explicitly exempted, access to public records may be granted to anyone requesting it. This includes public school records and directories. Many people are not aware of this oversight in the law.

Making home phone numbers and addresses publicly available potentially endangers our children and families. Exempting this information from FOIA allows parents to determine for themselves who should have access to information about their children.

This bill has bipartisan support and has been sent to the Senate Judiciary Committee for consideration.

Reducing Phosphorous to Clean Up Michigan's Lakes and Streams

One of the most effective things done in Michigan to clean up water resources was the action taken in the late 1970s to reduce phosphorous in laundry detergents. That set the stage for reductions of more than 70 percent in phosphorous pollution in many of our southern Michigan rivers. The next logical step is to apply the same pollution controls to dishwashing detergents.

I introduced a bill earlier this year that would require dishwashing detergents to contain no more than 0.5 percent phosphorous by weight, the same limit that applies to laundry detergents sold in Michigan. Most dishwashing detergents currently contain six to eight percent phosphorous. Much of this ends up in our rivers and streams which causes increased algae growth.

The excessive amounts of algae starve the aquatic life of the oxygen they need to survive. Using dishwashing detergent that is low in phosphorous helps keep our rivers and streams pollutant free. Many of our local food co-ops and natural food stores carry detergent for dishwashers that have much lower phosphorous content than most name brand products.

Consumer Information – Clip and Save

Washtenaw County Prescription Plan (WCPP)

For more information or to enroll in the plan, call the Washtenaw Health Plan at 734-484-7200, ext. 4259.

MDOT Lane Closure Website - website to help avoid construction delays.
www.mdot.state.mi.us/laneclosure

Information about home owner's, renter's, and automobile insurance in Michigan.
<http://www.michigan.gov/cis>
Click on the link for the Office of Financial and Insurance Services.

Michigan Career Portal - this site is a bridge to state and national employment, career, education, and training resources.
<http://www.michigan.gov/careers>

Office of Financial and Insurance Services Consolidated Licensing Website for insurance, securities, and consumer finance licensing functions.
www.michigan.gov/ofis

The National Do Not Call Registry - gives you an opportunity to limit the telemarketing calls you receive. Beginning October 1, 2003, most telemarketers will be required to remove the numbers on the registry from their call lists.
www.donotcall.gov or call 1-888-382-1222.
For TTY, call 1-866-290-4236.

Office Hours

Office Hours will be held from **8:00 am - 10:00 am** at the following locations. Please stop by to share a concern, ask a question, or just have a cup of coffee and chat.



Friday • October 3, 2003
Pierce's Pastries
103 W. Middle • Chelsea

Friday • November 7, 2003
Oasis Cafe
20 N. Washington • Ypsilanti

Friday • December 5, 2003
Sweetwaters Cafe
123 W. Washington • Ann Arbor

Emerald Ash Borer Found in Washtenaw County: Don't Transport Firewood!

In the summer of 2002, the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), an exotic insect originally from Asia, was detected in six southeast counties, including Washtenaw. Since this pest is very destructive, the Michigan Department of Agriculture has issued quarantines on ash trees and tree parts in the



affected counties, prohibiting the movement of ash trees, limbs, firewood, logs, and untreated ash lumber to areas outside of the specified regulated counties. Unfortunately, there is not yet a known treatment to save trees from this pest.

To date, the EAB has killed or damaged millions of ash trees. If you have ash trees on your property, it is important to inspect them to see if they have been infected. The upper third of the tree will die back first, followed by the rest the next year. This is often followed by a large number of shoots or sprouts arising below the dead portions of the trunk. The adult EAB is dark metallic green in color, 3/4 inch in length, and 1/16 inch wide. The adult beetles typically make a D-shaped exit hole when they emerge.

For more information, including how to identify ash



trees as well as signs and symptoms of EAB infestations, call the Michigan Department of Agriculture at 1-866-325-0023 or visit the MDA website at www.michigan.gov/mda and click on "Emerald Ash Borer" in the Spotlight section. You can also visit www.emeraldashborer.info.

Land Use Leadership Council Promotes Balanced Growth Strategies

The Michigan Land Use Leadership Council completed its hearings around the state and approved 57 recommendations to send to Governor Granholm. My fellow council members and I held hearings throughout the state and took testimony from local officials, builders, farmers, developers, environmentalists, and many others to help determine the best plan for land use in Michigan. The findings from these hearings helped form a comprehensive report which was presented to Governor Granholm and legislative leaders in mid-August.

The Council was able to reach consensus on many proposals to reduce urban sprawl in Michigan. There was overall agreement with the idea that in order to save farmland we must reinvest in our cities. Declining urban areas already have the infrastructure in place to handle new development. Instead of moving farther and farther away

from cities and occupying more of our farmland and open spaces, we should work to streamline processes for developers to build in urban areas and take advantage of existing infrastructure.

Another recommendation is the use of multijurisdictional planning. The Council recommended using financial and other incentives to encourage local governments to work together on development plans. Again, this would lessen the need to build new infrastructure and promote development in areas that are already served by urban services. The state would give priority to infrastructure investment (such as roads, sewer, and water) in communities that have engaged in planning with neighboring jurisdictions and have put these improvements in their plans.

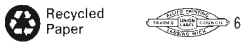
Serving on the Land Use Leadership Council was very rewarding. The final report reflects the commitment by council members to address the growing need for a balanced growth strategy in our state. There have been a number of studies and recommendations over the past decade regarding land use in Michigan, but none have been acted upon. I am hopeful that the plan and recommendations the Council has put forward will promote sound measures to curb sprawl, protect farmland, and reinvest in our cities.





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Liz Brater

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Additional Benefits for Michigan's Long-Term Unemployed

Some of Michigan's nearly 53,000 long-term unemployed could be in line for \$206 million in additional jobless benefits under a first-time Worker Assistance Plan introduced by Governor Granholm in July. I sponsored the Senate version of the legislation that would allow Michigan to secure additional federal dollars.

This new plan allows Michigan to change the way it calculates its unemployment rate. Under our current system, some individuals seeking work, such as people who have never had a job or those who have exhausted their benefits, are not included in the unemployment rate. The new Worker Assistance Plan will allow us to calculate unemployment based on the total unemployment

rate, which includes all unemployed workers.

Under the Worker Assistance Plan, Michigan workers would be provided additional unemployment benefits through the federal Temporary Extended Unemployment Compensation-X (TEUC-X) program and the federal-state Extended Benefits (EB) program. In order to trigger onto these programs, the state's total unemployment rate must average 6.5 percent or higher for three months. This is the first time in Michigan's history that the state has exercised



this option to tap into additional federal dollars.

We must extend every protection possible to Michigan workers during this economic downturn. This new approach to measuring unemployment rates is the most effective to bring relief to Michigan's long-term unemployed residents.

2004 Budget Eliminates \$1.7 Billion Deficit *continued from front page*

- The Governor's recommended School Rainy Day Fund will receive \$75 million from federal emergency funds. This special savings account will be used to fund education programs in the event of further economic hardship.
- Preschool and early childhood education programs will be maintained at \$72.8 million in funding.
- Health care programs for those who need it most will be realized as the increase in Family Independence Agency (FIA) and Medicaid caseloads will be funded for the coming year. Efforts are being made to maintain the most critical programs, although adult dental care was cut and some families are being cut off from child care.

There was not sufficient support for increasing fees or to pause state income tax cuts in order to fund important social services, environmental, and local government programs at current levels. The Department of Environmental Quality has suffered in this budget, as has higher education, the FIA, and other important state programs. I will continue to advocate the need for fully funding these programs.